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CONSCIENCES

BY STARK YOUNG

HALF an hour out from the Piræus I went down to the steerage deck to watch the land from there and to see the people. There were all sorts of them, Arabs in white, Turks with fezzes, Albanians with their embroidered jackets and short full skirts, Greeks, Syrians, Jews and Italians; there were soldiers, tradesmen with great bales of goods on which they sat cautiously, women, peasants and priests. Near the prow an old man with a long tunic, a twisted turban on his head and a wide beard, was blowing a pipe; the stream of its shrill music seemed to lie on the sound of the water and of the light wind in the sails. At the other end of the boat they were playing the concertina, a wild, half riotous, half tragic music, and a group of men were waltzing. All these people stirred and talked and walked constantly about, smoking, drinking out of bottles that they had with them, sitting on ropes, leaning over the rails, squatting on their heels about the decks. And best of all was one old peasant woman, long past seventy, from somewhere in Asia Minor, who sat lolling against a bale of luggage made from a Turkish rug and laced about with cords. There was something very bonny and blithe about her, the little brown face wrinkled like a walnut shell, the bright black eyes, the white teeth, the finger tips stained red with henna; her chatter never leaving off, and the young soldiers gathering about her, talking, listening, laughing, and lighting for her the cigarettes which they presented and which she smoked one after another as she reclined there, holding them airily in her hand and making gestures with them as she talked. I stood watching her and the young soldiers. And as I watched, I could hear the sound of the pipe, the far-off concertina, the rich voices, the laughter, the shuffling feet, the songs here and there, against the low flap of the sails, and the wind in the rigging and the long murmuring swish of the blue water alongside.

Meanwhile Athens faded in the soft light, sunset came on and passed; the gleaming Acropolis, with Pentelicon beyond and Lykabettos and the other mountains there, grew more and more like a dream. The pipe left off; and the old man who played it, seeing me watching him perhaps, came over to me smiling and said in broken Italian that he could write his name, if the Signore would allow him; and spelt out for me on an envelope *Sophocles Anastasiou*. There it was, he said. And then in the golden light we saw the temples of Corinth, high up to the south of the canal, bright on the barren, tawny hilltop, the wretched modern town below almost forgotten in the lengthening shadows. The temples arose, in that strange poetry that columns take with their lines against the air; they seemed far away, ageless, beautiful, solitary. There was no longer any wind and the sails had grown quieter; the water and the sails made only one low sound.

I heard a voice behind me.

"Well," it was saying, "I don't wonder St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians."

I recognized the nasal twang of him and turned to listen. A man in tweeds stood there beside a lady in tweeds, just behind me. He was pointing up toward that high summit of old Corinth, which seemed higher than ever in the fading light, and he repeated his joke with more stress.

"No, sir; I don't wonder St. Paul *wrote* to the Corinthians."

I nodded and tried to smile agreeably; after all there must have been worse jokes from travelers in Greece. He shook hands.

"So you are from the States?" he said. "Meet my wife." And then as I was about to introduce myself, he started and caught at his wife's arm, and snapped his fingers.

"*By George!*" he said, "*By George!*"

"What?" I asked, "what is it?"

"Nothing. *By George!* Say!" He turned on his wife. "Have you got it? Did you see what I did with it? Say—!"

"Oh, dear!" she cried; and they began tracing themselves about the harbor, to the fruit shop, the postal cards, the restaurant near the quay. I offered to help them. Could I help them? I asked. Was there anything I could do?

There was not, they answered; nothing could be done. I must

pardon them. They had forgotten something, that was all, the lady said; they had left something.

"A piece of an antique statue," the man said; "piece of an antique statue."

An antique statue! I was very sorry. I asked about it; where they had found it; how they were getting it out of Greece, through the customs? Was it large? It was only a small thing, they replied. And from their details I concluded that they knew nothing of marbles. Forget it, they said. We passed to other subjects. He was from Brown University, he told me, and had been three years in a missionary college somewhere near Constantinople. A stocky man, under thirty, with stiff thick hair, a short nose, strong teeth and hands, and honest grey eyes, he seemed very boyish and innocent and hearty and simple as he stood there talking with that honest staccato of his and in that careless voice. His wife was a big, athletic young woman,—she was from Mount Holyoke College, he said,—with a broad, honest face also, thick braids, bright color, handsome in her way like a great oatmeal loaf, full of serious health and moral intention, piously romantic too, though a trifle heavy and dull. We talked, and I inquired about their lives there in the East, if they had felt its power, if they had known many Turks, if they meant to return. No, they had seemed rather to be back at home in America in many ways, staying there at the college with the work, the teaching and the personal contacts; so much could be done in the work by personal contact. They had had a delightful circle at the college and often very pleasant evenings together, everybody; or writing letters home. But they were of course very glad to get back again to God's country after so long. Now they were going to tour Italy on their way north; they had been saving up money for that. That's why they were coming steerage, to save for Italy. Did I know some good hotels not too dear? I named hotels and said that the steerage was more interesting, no doubt; on the upper deck there were largely tourists and business agents. They said that after all it was only one night and they liked to sleep out. After a while I wandered off to another part of the ship. "Perhaps your marble will turn up somewhere in your things," I said consolingly as I left.

"No hope of that," the young man said; "fat chance we got!" I admired his stoical endurance.

Off Patras there was some sort of delay, two days of quarantine for a fever on board; and I had a chance to see more of the passengers. The most interesting figure among them, among the sixty or more tourists and agents in the first cabin, was a young American, a fellow of twenty, not very tall, with a pallid, yellowish, ivory-like skin, large, vague grey eyes, and loose, thick, wide lips. He belonged evidently to a party made up otherwise, except for himself and two old ladies, of college girls, under the guidance of a minister; but I never saw him with them. He used to roam about the deck with a notebook in his hand, but seemed shy and spoke to no one. But there was an air about him of some intense center of living within himself; he had a kind of misty distinction that set him apart from every one on board. I used to wonder what he could be thinking about, and if he was a genius or only a little dreamer lost in himself. There was that loose, red, full mouth; there were those brooding grey eyes with their shadows, upon that pale quiet face and its cloud of brown hair. I wondered about him. I saw him around the decks, and wondered what things they were that plunged him into such caverns of lonely thought. But he never cared to speak. And then the last night out, as we neared Brindisi, I came upon him in the smoking-room, in a corner, with a glass of Marsala in front of him and his notebook open. I sat down at one side of the table. There was no easy escape for him.

We were getting in before long, I said to him. Too bad; I had hoped he and I might have a talk.

It was two hours yet and more, he said, looking down at his glass. He had wanted to talk with me, too, but he had been afraid of me.

We laughed over that, and began. In five minutes he had become voluble. He was from Salem; he was going to Harvard next year, where he would be a freshman; he was going to do well, he knew that because he knew what he was going there for; so many men went there with nothing really planned and wasted their time. They were not serious in their thoughts.

But the notebook, I asked; was he studying here in this part of the world?

No, no, he said; but of course being in Jerusalem had been very interesting to him because it concerned a subject very interesting to him. Something he had been studying on and thinking about a long time, for five years. And what was that? I asked.

"The Resurrection of Christ."

"What about that?"

"Well," he said, "I can prove conclusively that the account given in the Bible of the Resurrection is not true; it cannot possibly be true."

"Really?" I said, wondering.

"Absolutely." He pushed the glass and the notebook away from him and brought his palm down on the table. "Absolutely, and I can prove it to you. It's this way." He squared himself against the wall behind him. "The Bible says explicitly that Jesus was put to death on the day of the preparation, the day before their Sabbath, which was Saturday, so that makes it Friday. Doesn't it?"

I agreed to that.

"Friday. Granted. But mark this! Now, we know for a fact that the Jewish Sabbath began on Friday. Friday evening at six o'clock, to be exact. Granted. There was no time, then, for preparations for the burial of the body, since the Jews would do no more than they could help on the Sabbath. So they had to get some friend to lend his tomb to be used temporarily. That must have been the case. And who was that friend? Joseph of Arimathea. Now another thing! The Bible says the Marys stood watching from afar. The cemetery must have been a very large place; you know how they were cut into the rock, how one finds them now in these countries. Well, in this place there must have been a great number of these sepulchres or grave openings. How then could the Marys have seen in just which tomb the burial took place? And there you are!"

I remembered the beautiful account in St. Mark, of how the Marys stood watching from afar that dying figure lifted on the Cross; and how they were near when Joseph of Arimathea laid Jesus away in that new sepulchre in a garden. But it seemed useless to stop this strange argument or to break the thread that the young man was weaving so eagerly. I said only, "Go on."

"Watching from afar," he went on. "Granted. Well, then, when they came again bringing frankincense and offerings, how could they in all that number of tombs know which was the one they sought? There must have been, as we have seen, a great many of them, say twelve hundred at least. To be conservative, say twelve hundred or a thousand tombs. The Marys had stood, say, a quarter of a mile away. Well, what must we conclude? They could not possibly have been able to find the right tomb. They had to ask someone, a caretaker perhaps, or someone's relative there looking around, who told them that He Whom they sought was not there. They evidently thought the person was an angel, which was natural enough in their excitement. It frequently happens."

"What frequently happens?"

"That people think things when they are excited. Don't you grant that? I can prove it to you."

"Certainly," I said.

"And so this proves that the account of the Resurrection cannot be true. And I've read every commentary on the subject. I've thought about it for years. I've always been interested in religion, had ancestors that were. I know all the arguments. But they won't stand. Every Sunday when I'm in church I think of this and have all I can do not to get up and debate with the minister. But if I did that my old man would die. He's a family friend, that's why I'm on this tour with him. But I could prove it to him."

His eyes were blazing. The pale brow was flushed, a vein stood out; I could see its throbbing. I tried to shift the subject a little, by teasing him on his consistency.

"But then in this case," I said, "if you believe as you do about the Resurrection and discard all that part of the Bible as you do, how can you consider yourself a Christian and go to church?"

"I don't know. Like the form of it, I suppose. It's a good place to sit and think. And I like music."

"But if you feel that your argument is so important, I should think you would have to stand by your convictions."

"Habit, I guess," he said.

"Well," I said, "it's very hard to understand how you can combine all this."

He shrugged his shoulders, and I added teasingly, and trying to make the point fantastically, which after all seemed the kindest way out,

"Suppose you firmly believed that we should all have our teeth pulled out. Had proved this completely to yourself. And yet you went on keeping your teeth in because the people around you believed in having teeth—"

But his eyes lit up again. He brought his fist down with a bang on the table.

"Take the modern teeth," he burst out; "what are they? Are they any good? Are they not degenerating steadily? How many people, tell me, do you see with good sound teeth? Not these days. And yet we all know how much the health depends on having good teeth, don't we?"

It seemed too much to believe. I was overwhelmed. The young man went on, sitting straight up, making points against hot breads, hot drinks, modern nerves, tooth brushes, modern haste. Ten minutes at least had passed before he was interrupted by the professor from the missionary college, who came rushing into the room and up to me. He was unshorn and battered, for the three days instead of the one expected in the steerage had been hard on him.

"I've been looking for you all over the place," he said. "Look, we're about to land. See the light out there? The houses? Brindisi. Wanted to say good-bye. My wife asked me to say good-bye for her too. We're off for Rome."

The Salem youth had hurried away to find his party, and the two of us left now went outside on the deck.

But it was so late, Signori, they were explaining to the passengers, that after all we could not land, and must lie at anchor till the port officials came down in the morning and admitted us.

And so I stood there resting my elbows on the rail and thinking how this was the ancient harbor of the stag's head, the Bren-tesion of the Greeks, the Brundisium of the Romans, whose Appian Way led down to it, where the embarcations for the East were made, where Pompey withstood Cæsar for so long a

siege, where St. Paul landed, and Virgil died, and a thousand years later the Crusaders gathered. The quays were deserted now, save for a group of workmen and, in the shadow of a pile of shipping, an old man and a boy, squatting on their heels. It was a breathless summer night; the white houses and piazzas of the town lay scattered in gleaming squares and spaces of black shadows, the squares of white dropping away and growing smaller and whiter as they went into the low hills of the country round. There were lights in the taverns along down the water front, from the Hotel Internationale, from a house now and then over the town and now and then a street lamp, but very few. In a garden here and there black cypresses stood up; I could see the faint motion of them in the low wind, on which the smell of wine lees drifted to me. And then the old man, when he learned that there were passengers stirring on the deck, rose and came forward to the edge of the water, leaning on a staff and the boy leading him, and began to sing.

O bella Rosalia, la mia fanciulla!

he sang, standing on the stones that at this hour were silent and so white in the summer moonlight, sweeping his guitar and calling some mad passion that he knew into his faded voice. A sailor down near the prow began to sing also, the same song, and the crowd there to curse at him and laugh and applaud, and the two voices rose with a strange, solitary brightness together. The sea had grown stiller than the white town. Time and the world seemed about me everywhere; and through them the water, the light, the silence and the wind seemed to pass.

My companion leaned over toward me and shook my hand.

"Look," he said, "good-bye. And what I really want to say is that there wasn't any antique statue about it. What we left behind was a cold chicken. A cold roast chicken we had bought for lunch on board. Don't want to be telling you a lie."

STARK YOUNG.